

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: DIANA QUINONES  
INTERVIEWER: SYLVIA CONTOVER  
DATE: AUGUST 1, 1986**

**S = SYLVIA  
D = DIANA**

**Tape 86.27**

S: I am interviewing Diana, is it Quinones? Is that the way you pronounce it? [D: Umhm] [Interviewer is speaking too softly, cannot comprehend]

D: Yes, 107 Adams Street.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes I was. I was...well I was born in New York, but my parents are Puerto Rican. I was brought up here, and they decided to go back to the country. Since then I lived there. I came back to the United States four years ago. I've been here for four years.

S: Where in New York did you live?

D: I lived all over. I was born in Manhattan. I lived in Brooklyn, New Jersey, Coney Island. So I've been around.

S: [Cannot hear] New York. Are there many Puerto Ricans there?

D: Yes. In those years mainly all the Puerto Ricans, that was the first place they would go to, and ah, in the thirties.

S: Why was that?

D: Well I guess because most of them, well they had the opportunity to have people that spoke their languages. And to see where they went to, they didn't have the problem of

speaking with Americans because they had people that spoke their languages. So that was the first place that they went to in those years.

S: And why did they come to Lowell?

D: Well I've heard, because it's known that Massachusetts is being, economically is in a big progress and New York is going down. The unemployment is increasing a whole lot. And basically the Puerto Ricans are looking to succeed in their economical situation. So that's why they're all immigrating to Massachusetts. And that's why I came down here. I came here with. . . I don't have relatives here, I just have friends, and they spoke to me how Massachusetts was. And I thought it was a great opportunity for me to grow, me and my son, in education and economically speaking.

S: Now let's go back to Puerto Rico. [Tape was shut off and begins again] So you were brought up in New York. You were born in New York?

D: Yes. I was born, [six brothers] were born and raised in New York.

S: Now where did your family come from in Puerto Rico?

D: They came from Ponce, [unclear] city of Puerto Rico.

S: And what did your father do there?

D: Well up there he was a farmer. He worked for the government in [unclear].

S: Oh, when they worked in farming they worked for the government?

D: That depends on... Some farmers have their own farms. Some farms, the government pays the farmers to take care of them.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: No. They provide...the government provides the land so they could work on it.

S: So eventually you have to give it back?

D: Yes. My mother and my father... [Phone rings, tape turned off and on again].

S: We were interrupted by the telephone call, so why don't we continue [unclear]. Your parents left Puerto Rico and went to New York? [D: Yes] Did they have friends there? Is that why they went there?

D: Well my mother, her sisters were all living in New York. And she decided to go with them and try to progress at that time. Puerto Rico was really in bad condition economically speaking.

S: Was your mother working in Puerto Rico?

D: Ah, no. No, she was young at that time. I believe she was sixteen or seventeen. So she went to New York and she started working in hotels at that time. Then she met my father in New York. So they got married down there and they had six children.

S: They were all born in New York?

D: All born in New York.

S: Are there any still living in New York?

D: No. Um, we scattered sort of. We went back to Puerto Rico and my mother passed away. My brothers, three of them, they served with the Military Services. Two of them finished their years and one is still active and is planning to retire. He's in the Navy right now. He's in Florida. And ah, there's two in New York, and the rest are still in Puerto Rico.

S: So you stayed here because of your friends?

D: Yes. I had a friend, and although I do have a good background, I'm a professional, Puerto Rico didn't pay enough. Teachers, professionals, secretaries and so forth...

S: So you got all your education in Puerto Rico then?

D: Yes I did. I took all my education in Puerto Rico. I finished my fourth year and my University in Puerto Rico. And I found myself without work. Mainly I worked in many places because Puerto Rico runs through contracts with the government. And certain years the contract is done, it's over and you have nowhere to go. So I decided to work with this foundation. It's a Cultural Foundation and it's a Musical School. They wanted help. I opened the Foundation. I worked with them, with the government, trying to get some funding for them. And right now they are doing well. They're helping handicapped to have an opportunity to learn their culture, develop music, um, play instrument, whatever they would like to. Poor people were given the opportunity to create some ability in the music area. And I feel proud of it. We've got famous musicians in the schools. And the Director, they all come from one family. The Foundation comes from the [Julio Varados]. They are very well known. They're our main um, how would I say it? They represent our culture. They. . .all our traditional music comes from [Julio Varados]. The Bamba, the Plena, they wrote it for us. It's been years that they've been representing the Puerto Ricans.

S: What are some of the [Cannot hear the questions]?

D: Well like I said, it's lack of money. I couldn't make it with the rate they were giving. It wasn't enough. Puerto Rico is very expensive to live, but there's not enough work,

there's not enough money that you could really have a future. And I did it because I love arts, and I love my culture, and I wanted to give something to my country. And I did. I gave them a school. I gave them something to look forward to. And I think that that's more satisfying than money sometimes.

S: [Cannot hear beginning of question], or did you go to New York?

D: I went straight to, I came straight to Lowell, because my friends told me how it was progressing and how many opportunities I would have. So I said, well this is my chance to go for it. And I came here. Although there is lots of work, I found lots of barriers. I found people that were racists. I found that although I had the ability and I was a professional, I didn't have a chance to do what I wanted, because I found lots of people that were racists. And I was disappointed because I saw people... At least I spoke a little English. I looked at the others that don't speak the language, how bad they were. And I came to live in the Acre. In fact I came to live in 216 Adams Street. And I saw the way people were living and I found that really disappointing. I had to do something for my people. I had to help them out. And I used to go by the Acre and see Coalition for a Better Acre. And I was saying to myself, I didn't know the organization at that time, what are they doing? You know, they're saying a better Acre! And the Acre is, you know, falling apart. That was around a year ago. And I got involved with the CPA and I learned a lot from them. I found out what they were trying to do for the people that lived in the Acre, not only for Hispanics, but other immigrants. Cambodians, South East Asians, all kinds of people, and I felt proud of it and I wanted to be part of it. And I said, well the first job I had was social worker. I was a social worker. And I won't mention the department I came from, but I found lots of people there that were racists. They weren't helping out people like they were supposed to. And they were just taking advantage of the people that didn't speak the language. And I was really frustrated about it. Lots of people are being, you know, they were taking advantage of them. People that don't speak English, they have to go to a place where maybe they'll be paid \$3.35, or maybe \$4.00, and that's not enough. You know, the rent here is so high.

And I think that the main thing, what is needed here for adults, it's a real good education in the language. They need that opportunity. And I don't see there's a lot of that happening here in Lowell. And I would like to see that happen. I would like to see schools getting more adults involved helping them in their education. Some, because I'm a community organizer, they tell me what their experiences have been. And they tell me, "Well I have gone to some programs and it hasn't been enough. You know, they just teach you the basic." But communication skills, they don't have that. And I think that's the most important thing that we need to have. Stress teachers that would teach the communications skills. And so... [Tape is turned off then on again]

S: All right, just continue [cannot hear rest of comment].

D: Okay. After um, when I was working as a social worker the people would tell me that they were going to places and they were kept apart. You know, like I had an experience with this guy that he wanted to work in the supermarket. And because he was

colored, the people, the employees wouldn't want to be next to him. You know, they would put him apart. Like you know, this guy is something weird. We don't want him. He's black. And they give up. They just go, they just drop their job. And there's lots of women that do the something, because the people don't want to be next to them because they're colored. And also housing, I found people that have been going searching for apartments, and because they're colored. . .they won't say it's because of that, but they know they have a vacancy and they'll tell him no, you know? And they know off hand it's because of that. Now they use their new technique like I say, they just push away, but they're racists. They don't want to be in their building.

That's why you see there are lots of Latin people, they don't last long in employed, because they're being mistreated. The people don't want to get involved with Hispanics because they're colored. Our race is known as [African], because...I don't know if you know our history. We were mixed with blacks too. They bought slaves at that time and they mixed our race with black. But our original own species were Indian, pure Indian, and we are colored, but the Africans mixed our race.

But we don't care about that. We are not racists. We welcome anyone and we are very friendly. That's why our Island, our people are known as friendly people, because we were brought up that way. We are not racists. So this has been going on since I've been here. People have been telling me how they were treated. They lose confidence in the country and they would like to see. . .there were some changes. I know we have lots of resources. And all we need is to educate the people. Give them an opportunity. There are lots of people that I've bumped into that are on welfare. Like I know professional nurses, secretaries and so forth, teachers that we could give them an opportunity to work here in the United States, but they've seen that barrier and they don't feel interested. They're like afraid of facing the, like they say, the white people because they treat them so bad. And we are very sensitive people. We are very sentimental. And we could get adjusted to anything. But if we're treated bad, we'll go away. You know, we'll just shy away from everything. But we are very aggressive people. We like to work a lot, but we like to be treated fair. And that's why I got involved with CPA. I found out what their goals were. And one of them is to work with the immigrants. Give them an opportunity to progress here. And I feel proud of being on CPA, because that's what I want to see. That's what I want to do.

So I have lots of issues going on. I'm working with. I'm trying to get the Hispanic cable in Lowell so that the people have their language through the cable network. And I got the crime campaign going on, because you know that the Acre has been known as the worst. And we're trying to get people to go away and change the Acre totally. I'm negotiating with the landlords to bring up to code, their buildings, so that the people will have a decent unit to live in, and so forth. And I got also a voting registration campaign going on. I want to educate everyone. Show them that that's a basic need. They need to get involved with the politics, but vote, because I think that's the main power. If you don't vote you don't have no right to demand your certain needs. And the people working there, they want, they say, "Diane whatever you do, I'm willing to back you up." We need someone like you to help us educate us. Show us the way to do things. And the last

meeting I had, I had over two hundred people, with the cable manager meeting at the Oblate Center. That's only a small issue we're talking about. And they're showing that they're really ready to go for it this time. I think in a few years you're going see lots of people involved in lots of campaigns, lots of issues. And it's all because the people are awakening; that they have some one that's giving them a hand and what they really need.

S: [Cannot hear beginning of question] help you with the housing, but that's not your part, but that's part of that Coalition for a Better Acre?

D: Yes it is my part, and it's part of the Coalition also. But as a community organizer, the main job is to work in housing problems, and that's what I'm doing not only for Hispanics, but all other immigrants that need... I'm trying to get involved with the South East Asians, to help them out because I know they're living in real bad conditions, maybe even worse than the Hispanics are. And I'm trying to get in touch with an interpreter because the language is my problem there. But I hope to help not only the Hispanics, but all the immigrants that need that sort of help in housing.

S: Well you're doing a fine job here as I can see, and all of the housing [going up too].

D: Yes, it is really, it's working really good. The landlords in the Acre are negotiating with us. They're willing to bring up to code the buildings, but it's because the community has come with me. They're working hard together. We also have a community Neighborhood Improvement Committee. And people that live here, they want a park, a public park for their children. They want the city to fix the streets and so forth. I think it's a really good new beginning, and I think the Acre is coming back again.

S: Tell me about, I mean like how old were you when you went to school in Puerto Rico?

D: I was, I started at the age of twelve and I left.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes I did. And it's kind of funny, because then I started losing my English when I dedicated myself to the Spanish language. So I came back to United States and then I'm here, I'm keeping up with my language again.

S: So you said that when you went to Puerto Rico, when you were in New York, you couldn't speak Spanish at all?

D: Just a little bit. My mother would say a few words, but I didn't know how to read or write it. And I think that's the problem that the people are facing here.

S: So what was the difficulty you had when you went to Puerto Rico, because it must be the same problem they're having, Puerto Rican children are having here. So you went to school where? What happened?

D: Well that's the problem. When I went down there my first language was English and the teacher down there didn't speak English. The only teacher that spoke English was my English teacher. So the teachers didn't know how to communicate with me. I understood a little bit so, what I understood, I would write it down in my book in English cause that was my language. And I would always go to my teachers and ask them to help me out. And they would tell me, well you know, you have to try to learn by yourself because I don't have time to sit down with you only. I've got more students. I've got over forty students. So it was kind of hard. The government down there don't have special education for people that come from other countries. So I had to learn on my own. I took a dictionary and I would go everyday to my mother and with a special word I would keep in my mind and ask her, "I learned this word. What does it mean today?" You know, and she would tell me. She was my teacher. My mother was my teacher. But because my mother spoke both languages, she never thought she would go back to Puerto Rico, so she wasn't worried about it. So she was always talking to us in New York in English. And then all of a sudden we went to Puerto Rico she found herself well, you know, I have to teach them. So she would take some time and teach us the language. So I learned a great lot of Spanish with her.

S: When you came to Lowell how did you adjust to it?

D: Well seeing that I was brought up in New York, I was a little bit Americanized like I would say. But most of my life, my childhood was in Puerto Rico, so I had both, my Hispanic culture and my American. But I didn't feel bad. I thought I was going to miss my country. And I was happy to see that Massachusetts was traditional like my country is. They're historical just like my country is. And I felt fine about it I felt comfortable and I felt like I was at home.

S: So you feel that the other Puerto Rican people feel the same way because of that?

D: Well some do. Those who could speak the language I would say they would feel comfortable. But those that don't, I think they feel lost. Lost, and they miss the country because they don't have anyone they can go to, to help them out. You know, economically, looking for a job and so forth, housing. And some just go back to their country because they're lost here. But I think they would feel, they do feel comfortable because their surroundings are like at home. But if we talk about their needs, well you know, the language and stuff, they do feel uncomfortable.

S: So you are trying to do something about that [for the older people].

D: Yes I am.

S: What about the young people? Do you think they feel any prejudice [unclear]?

D: They do.

S: In school?

D: Yes, they bump into lots of kids that don't want to get involved with them. I could talk about my kid and his experience. My kid is very friendly, you met him earlier. He's very friendly and he doesn't see color, or he doesn't know the difference of groups. And he didn't speak English at all when I brought him here. And he was trying to get to know people. And he saw that, like they say, the white people would push him away. And he was sort of sad. He would tell me, "I want to go back to Puerto Rico. They don't want to play with me. They don't want to do anything with me." And he was really sad. And I think lots of kids. . .

S: How old is your son?

D: He's six.

S: And when did you bring him? How long have you been here?

D: He was four at that time.

S: So even at that time he felt the prejudice?

D: He felt it. He noticed it. I saw when I took him to the center, where they used to take care of him that the colored kids would play with him, but not the white kids. And [unclear] he would tell me, "These kids don't want to talk to me." And he didn't speak the language, but in a way he would try to communicate. Like you know, come and play with me, he would try to pull them. And they would just go away. He's my only son, but he would, he got adjusted to any other group you know. And kids that I've known from different ages, they've come with that same problem to me they tell me. So the kids here are different than kids I grew up with. They don't want to talk to me. They don't want to do anything with me. I don't like it here, they would tell me. I say, well give yourself some time. Once you learn a little bit of English you'll have a chance to show them who you are and you'll get some good friends. And after awhile you'll get adjusted. But most of them, they would always stay in their group, you know, Hispanic. The South East Asians I've seen they stay in their group. So we still have a lot to go. We need to break that barrier.

S: Where do most of the Puerto Ricans work in Lowell?

D: Most of them work in industry. I've noticed that. And they're getting paid real low rates just like the South East Asians, Cambodians. And I think they take advantage of them because they say, "Well you don't speak English." And because you don't speak it, that's why we cannot pay. You know, well you know, because I know lots of people that are really professionals and they have to go to work in machinery, on some operating machine, or some assembling things, and they just pay poor because they don't speak the language.

S: Do you think it's because they don't speak the language, [Cannot hear rest of question]?

D: Well, I'm going to be honest. I haven't bumped into the [colored man]. I think that they get paid enough. I've heard through the people that have spoken to me, they get paid more than what they get. Well maybe there is and you know, they're being discriminated also. That wouldn't surprise me, because if they're doing that to Hispanics they'll do it to the blacks too.

S: Now how about the religion [unclear]. Are they very religious?

D: Yes, we are very religious. We are very, [unclear] respect to our religion. That's the main living source. We cannot live without that. We have people that are, most of them are Catholics. I don't know how [few words unclear]. And Evangelists, you'll see lots of Evangelists groups in Lowell. I don't know if you've noticed that. The Catholics are very strong here too. Hispanics are very catholic.

S: Now do they go to the [unclear] church?

D: Yes. We have the Oblate Center that's dedicated to Hispanics. We've got Father Leo and Val. They're very. . .

S: Where is that?

D: This is on Moody Street, 517 Moody Street. That's where all the Hispanics go to. Now the Evangelists and Pentecostals, they have different churches throughout Lowell. I've noticed there's lots of churches. We need more churches in the Catholic religion to be developed.

S: [Cannot hear the question.]

D: Well yes. They are. . .the Evangelists especially, because they're dedicated. They go against their groups wherever they are. The Catholics don't have the same opportunities as the Evangelists, because the Evangelist group is mainly created by the community. So they have the opportunity of having transportation to bring their groups into the churches. Now the Catholics, I don't see it very strong in that aspect.

S: Do they go to church regularly? Do they go to mass every week? [Unclear]?

D: Which group are we talking?

S: The children.

D: The children?

S: The children, yes.

D: Okay. Yes. The Evangelists, they go everyday to church.

S: How about the catholic children?

D: The catholic? I haven't seen much movement. I think they just go to Sunday school, and well they have the Communion. They take their Communion Classes and Confirmation Classes. But I see that the Evangelists and the Pentecostals are very strong. Now Puerto Rico, if you talk about Puerto Rico, they're very strong. They have lots of beliefs.

S: Do they have [unclear] in Puerto Rico?

D: Yes.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes. There's only...that's, and that's another thing I would like to work on to bring our culture up, is that we only have a festival. That's when the Hispanics get together. And I'm kind of sort of disappointed. I think we have lots of resources. We could show the United States our culture. We could show them our traditions. And I haven't seen that in the past years that I've been here. It's only once a year and I think we should create more programming for the Hispanic community. There's lots of things we can do and we could show others to work with.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Well, yes. In Christmas time we get together. We call it Three Kings' Day. That's in January. Like I said before, we are very religious. We're not fond of Santa Claus because we look Christmas as something very religious. Um yes, we do, although we are very religious we do celebrate Santa Claus. It's kind of odd. You go see in Puerto Rico, Santa Claus with boots and a coat on. [Laughs] We do it. We're sort of a little Americanized. But we're very, very, how would I say it? The Three Kings' Day is very important to us, because that's the day where the Three Kings finally meet with Jesus and we celebrate that. We take the children and we sit and read the bible, and we talk about the story and how it happened. And we would show them to take up some grass and put it in a little shoe box, or whatever they have, put it under their bed. And we'd tell them that the Three Kings will come like they did the same with Jesus, he brings them some presents. So they look forward to that. So we would see him at Christmastime. [Unclear] on January the 6th, that's the Three King's Day, they would all go to their area. They would put a glass of water so the camel would drink the water, and have the grass so that they would eat after a long travel. And it's beautiful because you know, it's very religious, and I like that a lot. We keep that. This is something that I grew up with. My child still believes it.

S: So this tradition is continued here?

D: It's still alive, yes it is. Um, some, I've noticed some Puerto Ricans that live here, that were brought up here, they don't know that tradition. And I spoke to them about it and they say, "Wow, you really do that?" You know, I say, "God, you're Puerto Rican and you don't know that?" And they tell me, "No, cause my..."

**TAPE I, SIDE A ENDS  
TAPE I, SIDE B BEGINS**

D: Well at Christmas time we get together with the family. We make lots of traditional [unclear]. And that's when all the families get together. They come from all over and they all meet in one place. Then in May we've got [names holiday in Spanish]. That's when it rains a lot. I don't know if you've heard, and we celebrate that our flowers are blooming. And it's also religious. We dedicate it to Saint Mary. And we sing to her for a whole month. And the family, there's a certain family that has to dedicate this tradition throughout um, what do you call that? Through out ah...

S: The year, or the season? [Unclear].

D: No. The family, it chain. . .you know, if they pass away, the next...

S: Oh I see. Each family carries on the tradition, the same family?

D: Yes, the same family. If my parents pass away, I would have to keep doing and so forth. So it's a chain, it's for life. So . . .

S: What do they do exactly?

D: Okay. What they do is that we have religious songs, and we build up a small house where we get the groups to sing. These are the lead groups. And we have people coming from all over. Everyone is welcome to come to celebrate with us the month of May. So we, as the days go by we start decorating the house with flowers. And when the last day comes, we see the whole house full of flowers and it's beautiful. And we give out some drinks, tonic or whatever, cookies to the people to welcome them. And we give out the songs so they can sing with us all night. And even if it rains, we're out there singing. We see people coming from everywhere. And then we call, at the end we celebrate it with [says word in Spanish]. It's a stick full of grease. And the one that gets up the top, they get some prizes. They get money. Whatever they could get a hold of. So it's a lot of fun. But mainly we dedicate it to our religion. We dedicate the May for Saint Mary and the Three King's Day, the birth of Jesus.

S: Now are any of these traditions carried over in anyway, in a small way at all?

D: Ah, what do you mean? Here in the country?

S: Here, here in Lowell?

D: I haven't seen that since I've been here. I think that would be great if we could do that. In fact I spoke with the foundation recently, and they're coming to New York to celebrate with the Hispanics, the Month of May. They want to bring that to them. And I want to see if next year I could bring them here too. We could celebrate that together with everyone.

S: Oh, that would be one way of getting the community together.

D: Yes it would. You know, it would bring them memories. And I think that we would start our culture here. That's what we need, to build up the same traditions here.

S: So what cultures and traditions have they brought here? [Few words unclear] they brought from Puerto Rico.

D: I haven't. . .to be honest with you, here in Massachusetts, I would say New York because there are lots of Hispanics. You could see lots of traditional things going on there. But in Massachusetts the only thing I've seen is the Hispanic Festival they celebrate for a week is it? And it's not. . .they don't dedicate themselves to our traditional dances, our songs. They'll just go through the basics, like Miss Lowell and things. Things that the United States always do. And that's my main goal, that's my future project; that I want to build an organization where they dedicate themselves to the culture, and celebrate the month of May and the Hispanic culture.

S: Now you say that the dances [unclear] Puerto Rican dances? What type of dances are Puerto Rican dances?

D: Okay. Well ah, we got the Plena. That came from Ponce. That was one of our first dances. Um, Bamba. Although it came from the Africans, but it was initially started in Puerto Rico, the Bamba, and it's very beautiful. [Salsa] is not, it doesn't come from our country. It came from other Latin countries, and they were adopted in Puerto Rico. And Marengha also comes from another country but we do dance that a lot in Puerto Rico.

S: Are there any new dances at all here in Lowell?

D: They have some clubs, they dance, but they don't dance our traditional dances. They'll dance Salsa. Like I say, it is sort of disco, sort of, and [Marenghi]. But Bamba, Plena, I haven't seen that. I've heard there are groups in Boston, but I'm trying to get in touch with them to see what they could do in Lowell. But I haven't heard of much activity going on in Boston.

S: [Cannot hear the question]?

D: It's all folk. . .how do you call this?

S: Folk music?

D: Yes, it's folk music. It's the original music that comes from our country.

S: So none of that now is played here?

D: No. I've never seen it from the time I've been in Lowell.

S: When you hear radios playing for the young people [unclear] isn't that Puerto Rican music they're playing?

D: No. They're Mexican. They're from Argentina, Venezuela, but our music, no.

S: [Cannot hear the question]?

D: No. I've heard the Spanish groups that they have in Boston and all they play is Salsa. [loud noise]. Again, I emphasize that I want the, our music. The only way we can see that is creating an organization, creating a workshop showing our young kids, students, what their culture is all about and get them involved. And that's going to sing and bring up and you know, our music to come alive again, because it's draining away here.

S: [Cannot hear the question]?

D: Yes. My major was music. I'm a musician. I play the flute and I was dedicated to my music, to our culture. That's why I got involved with the Foundation, because in Puerto Rico it was fading away also. You know, people getting modern and all you hear is American music, and I found that very odd. And I said, well someone has to keep our music alive. And I got involved with the Foundation. I say, well this is what we want to do, and this is what we expect from Hispanics.

And now we got them doing...keeping our culture alive. And that's what we got to do down here. And I think it's a great opportunity. We've got Hispanics that have the ability to perform, to show the others our traditional dances, our traditional music.

S: Now how are the Puerto Ricans in this community, how are they coping? You say some of them go back. They give up and go back, because of discrimination in [unclear] low paying jobs. How are the others coping? Do some of them do well eventually?

D: Some of them do. I was planning to go back to my country myself. I was planning on going back to the Foundation and work with them because I was scared. I said, well you know, with my background I thought I would find a good job instantly. And I did, it took me almost two years to find a decent job.

S: What did you do when you first came?

D: Well I came here, I was looking...I was out on the street looking for a job. And I guess because they saw that I was Hispanic, they told me, "Well you know you've got a

really good background, we'll let you know," and they would never call back. And I found myself in A.F.D.C. with welfare, which I never was in my whole life. You know, some people have that understanding that Hispanic people come here just to live off the government, and that's not true. It's the barriers they're confronting with. In the long run they have to because they have to live, they have to eat, you know? And I felt real bad about it. My money ran out; every thing ran out. And my friends would tell me, "Well why don't you go to welfare?" I didn't want to. I was like that for two months, you know, holding back on that. I know I want to work and that's it. I don't want to live on the government. I never did. I never did in Puerto Rico, even though I didn't have enough money to survive, I never wanted to.

But you know it's different, because in Puerto Rico you don't have to pay gas bill, because you don't need heat. You don't need to heat your water, because it's tropical. The water did not need to be heated. So in a way it wasn't that bad for me and my son. But here, well I have to pay gas bill, I have to pay light bill, rent. Well I found myself that I needed to go and live by the government, but I felt real bad about it. And when I went down there I felt bad because of the way they treat you. You know, they say, well you know, this is another one that wants to live off us, you know?

S: Did they actually say that?

D: They don't say that, but the way they talk to you, you know, they make you feel like that. So, you know, why didn't you come here before? Then how did you pay your rent? You know, how did you do it so far? And I would have to tell her, well you know, I had some money and I ran out of it. You know, that's how it is. You know, and I thought I would find a job. [Tape shuts off momentarily]

S: Well evidently all people had the same problem (D: Yes they do) coming here, because they can't get jobs.

D: That's right. So you know, like I said, the stronger...those people that are strong, they stay here, but the weak, they go back and they lose a lot. Some leave their homes, their apartments, and who knows what happens to them.

S: [Unclear] says that there's so many want ads in the newspapers, and people should be applying for jobs and they're not. I think they were also talking about the homeless people. But don't you think that the Puerto Ricans, they could apply for those jobs? Couldn't they? [Unclear]

D: Yes they do.

S: And then what happens?

D: Well I guess they prefer whites than Hispanics.

S: They don't hire them because they're Hispanic?

D: They don't hire them. How many Hispanics have you seen working in McDonalds?

S: They do try the job want ads?

D: Of course they do. They told me. I was a social worker. I've heard their stories. In fact I even took some of them to apply, to encourage them to don't give up. And you know, I would give them hope. You know, just wait, it takes times. They have to interview others. And you know, they wind up they never been called.

S: And even when they do get called [unclear]

D: They discriminate. Yah, they treat them bad. I guess that's their techniques, I don't know, to just push them away, force them to go. That's the way I look at it. Because I've met lots of professional people, it's amazing the way they, they're treated and they just have to give up.

S: Now the professional people, is it just because there aren't jobs in their field? You think maybe?

D: No. I think it's because they're being discriminated or they're afraid, or their language barrier. Okay, they never thought they would come to the United States and they finally decided to come. And maybe they thought, well Massachusetts was just like New York. You know, you could find place where English is not really needed. And they find themselves, well the first thing they tell you, well you have to speak English. If you don't, you know? So they shy away and they don't try to better themselves.

S: [Cannot hear the question].

D: Yes, and the way they're treated, the people don't encourage them to you know, struggle, don't give up. You know, they go through... I went to see this English Program they were giving at the Public Library for adults. And I saw the English they were giving. It's like elementary. It's not the way you could teach people to learn how to communicate, you know, to increase their communication skills. The Hispanics understand English, but they won't speak it. That's the problem. They need someone to help them exercise the language with another, and the teachers don't do that here.

S: So that's the main thing then. How about the International Institute, don't they teach the language there?

D: I heard they do, but people up there, they're only for students. That's what I've heard, but not for adults.

S: Mostly adults who are trying to get their [D: degrees?] citizenship papers. So therefore the Puerto Ricans don't qualify for that reason.

D: Don't qualify. Right, because we are Americans. So we don't have that opportunity. So what they wind up is going to the high school, going to the library, trying to find a program where they could adjust to and have the opportunity to increase their . . .

S: [Cannot hear the question].

D: Yes. That's one of my goals also. I'm dedicated to see what education we could get for them. And I think that's one of the main goals of going to the International Institute to see what resources they have, because we are Americans citizens. My ancestors fought for the Americans, nd I think we have that right to get the benefits others do.

S: What about UNITAS, that organization? Does that help the Puerto Ricans?

D: Well, they . . . people tell me through their experience um, they're not very happy about it, because they go up there and they look for a job. They tell them that they have to go through the screening thing. And they tell them, if you don't speak English, you don't get a chance to work. Most of the Puerto Ricans that go up there, they go to work. And everyone speaks, that UNITAS is the group that helps these people get a job. Most of them get a chance to go into, but they have to go through a training program. Some aren't willing to do it. Some, all they're interested in is working. So some are happy with the organization, some aren't, because we got people who are mature, and they say, "Hey I don't want to go through that hassle again to go back to school, you know, all I want is to work. And I don't have time to go to a classroom." So they just fade away.

S: Don't they pay [rest of sentence unclear]?

D: But it's not enough. You know, they cannot really survive with it.

S: I see. So where do they go to work eventually? Where do they get jobs?

D: Oh they wind up in [S: Prince Macaroni?] Prince Macaroni, Andover Medical. Andover Medical is known, all the employees are Hispanics. So they don't have problems. Most of them wind up in that factory. And I've heard that they're closing up the industry. They're moving out of Lowell. So we can imagine what's going to happen when they do. All these Hispanics, what's going to happen with them? What's their future?

S: And they haven't learned English, because they're all Spanish speaking?

D: They're all Spanish people. And people are adjusted. They're sort of dedicated to our people in a way. You know, they'll feel more comfortable working with Hispanic group because that's their language, then going to a factory where no one speaks Spanish. You know, they're lost. So when they heard about Andover Medical, they all wind up there. And now I've heard they're going close. So I don't know what they're going to do. Maybe they're going to have to go back to their country.

S: What other factories do they work in?

D: Ah, they work with the Wang Company. But basically what they do is maintenance work and maybe some simple assembling, which is not a very good paying job. Um, I've heard they go to Family Products. I don't know if you've heard of that company. It's really, that's a man's job and most of the people that work there are women. And I've seen women, they mold some plastic refrigerators. And I've seen the hands of those working women. Their hands are burnt in a terrible way from the plastic. They have to grab it with their hands and move it out of the oven. So it's terrible the way people...

S: That's a man's job you say?

D: That's a man's job and women are working there.

S: Why don't they hire Puerto Rican men for these jobs?

D: I guess the Puerto Rican men just don't put up with that, you know? They think, they say, well that's not fair. And plus the [pain or paying] is terrible. And the mother's, because they have children, they have no where to go, they wind up in that company working for those people. Hanging in there and hoping maybe they'll find another decent job. Most of them just, they're working there for years. It's terrible they way their hands are all burnt, but real severe burns.

S: Now why do you say it's a man's job? Is it heavy work?

D: It's heavy work. The plastic is heavy. First you've got to put your hands in ovens, you know, and it's a terrible thing. It's not a woman's job really, but these women don't have education. They don't have no other experience. So they wind up there working in that sort of job.

S: What other types of jobs... [words unclear] do they know of?

D: Ah, most of them are assembly work. And like I say again, they don't pay enough and so they just take what they got and they just work there for years. Um, I've heard people that have tried to get into Raytheon, and that's one of the best companies that pay and it's just luck. You know, you got to struggle your way in. And I believe there's a long waiting list. And if you don't have someone up there that will help you out, you don't get the job. But most of the people that have come here, they spoke to me about Raytheon, and they've been struggling for years to get in there. And that's one of the best paying.

S: How about the Puerto Ricans that made it in Lowell? [Question unclear]?

D: Yes. I've known lots of people that have made it professional. I have known [Isabel] Merendez. She's the Director of the Hispanic Organization in Lawrence. She's dedicated to the Hispanics. She's very good. Dalia Calvo is great. She works in

UNITAS. She's the Director in UNITAS. People that work in CTI. I know Anna [Biaz], Maria [Bellows], she's working in this office interpreting for the Hispanics. Secretaries, I've known secretaries that work in Legal Services. So there...

S: Is there a Spanish lawyer [unclear] in Lowell? [Unclear]

D: I've heard of a Spanish lawyer, Frank Melendez, but I haven't heard a [unclear]. Maybe there is, I'm not sure, but I've known lots of professional people.

S: Are there Puerto Ricans in the medical field? Nurses, doctors [unclear]

D: Not Hispanics.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Most of them wind up going to Medical Associates. There's a clinic in the Merrimack Street. Most of them are Hispanic. Yes, there are nurses, there are Hispanics. That's the only clinic I've seen that has Hispanics people working. I haven't seen in Lowell General, St. Joseph's or St. John's, Hispanic people working. I think we need that to provide better services.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes. There's plenty of Hispanics working in the Welfare Department. But those people are really being, they're being discriminated. They're not very happy in their job. I talk about it because of my experience. I wasn't happy. I wanted to do my job and I didn't feel comfortable about it. There's too much pressure and a lot of prejudice people working there.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: That's right, because they're working with all kinds of people. They're from all over the country.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: That's right. You're receiving people that are desperate, okay. I know there are people also that are cheating and stuff, but also there are people that are desperate. They are on the streets, they don't have food. And you know, I've seen people yelling at their clienteles and it's the most disappointing thing I've ever seen. You know, people just go away. I know people that are starving because they don't want to go to that office, because they're afraid of their social worker, because they don't treat them right. So I could imagine the Cambodians and the South East Asians, how they feel. I mean, they don't even speak English. At least most of the Hispanics understand a little bit of English and they could defend themselves a little, but what about the Cambodians and South East Asians.

S: So the agency [unclear].

D: No, not the way they're supposed to.

S: Are there any Puerto Ricans [unclear]

D: That's another thing I'm disappointed of. In Lowell we don't have anyone to represent us. And I think that's another thing that I'm going for. I want a representative from the city.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes. I've heard there are people that are being [encouraged] to, and they are trying to go [unclear] college.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes, yes, but then again, we need to give them all the support we can. They are struggling with their language barrier and like I said again, they bump into people that are racists. And if we find people that are blocking their way, they'll just go back on us.

S: What else can you tell me [unclear] that like to stay here. Do they go visit Puerto Rico [unclear]?

D: Yes they do. The people that live in a decent way of course they'll stay here. [Phone rings-tape shuts off momentarily]

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: They were living in really bad conditions. I have landlords. I could name out several. We have [unclear] coming around hopefully, that for years have had the worst buildings. We have Silva, also are in really bad conditions, his buildings. We've got Ray and Gloria and so forth. People are paying \$450.00 up to \$500.00, units that you can't live in. They have the worst code violation there is in the state, and the city has to address this. They have to enforce the code law, and I don't see that going on. We have to be calling all the time, asking the city to come and see the conditions. To follow up after the fourteen days. Nothing has been done. They just do a little bit of work and the building stays the same. And I don't think it's fair. People, they're on A.D.C. All their check goes on the rent. They don't have enough to eat. They just pay rent just to stay out of the streets.

S: [Unclear] is to double up so that [unclear]

D: That's right! Most of them do that. And then they find themselves, that the landlord evicted them because they have people, they're over crowded, but they don't see their needs. They don't see that they're living in a unit that is so expensive. They don't find housing. And this is the way they could help each other out sometimes, you know? Helping each other to pay the rent. They're so expensive. That's another real problem here in Lowell, the housing, and we need to address this. The city has to address this.

S: Are there many Puerto Ricans living in public housing?

D: Right now we're progressing on that. There are Hispanics that are moving into public housing. But it's like a raffle. You know, it's a long waiting list, and it's just you know, a matter of who's going to get what.

S: Do they subsidize them if they live in other apartments?

D: No.

S: They never get subsidized? There's no program like the Section 8 Program?

D: Section 8 Program. The only program they had... Well here at CTI, it's these units in the Acre, and I don't know how they pass inspection, because they all have violations, code violations. Well the truth is they haven't given him, the landlord rent increase because of the problem. But I don't think that's the way to approach that problem. I think they should stop paying rent until the landlords do put upgraded, their units. And that's another thing I'm working on. If they are willing to go to the city, willing to do whatever there is to be done to get the buildings up to date.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: There's no other resource that you could go to. Um, there's only Section 8, and not everyone qualifies.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: The Section 8? [S: Um] They have to be on A.F.D.C. Section 8 gives CTI [unclear] people who are living through the government, and can't pay their rent. So they fall into that contract. All of this area [unclear], most of them are through Section 8. But most people don't want to come down here because of the stories they hear, of the bad stories about the families and the drug problem. And we've been working out to change that image. We are working with the police, with the District Attorney, to have a hotline so they could call. And I don't know if you have noticed that the drugs are still there, but it's not that bad how it used to be. So hopefully these people will have to go and people will want to live here.

S: Now people here in the Acre [unclear]

D: Ah, yes. Most of them are Puerto Rican and South East Asian, Cambodians.

S: And do you have any other [unclear] communities here?

D: Um, I've seen a few Greek and Italian.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes, but most of them are Hispanics.

S: Now what other communities do the Hispanics in Lowell have? Where are [unclear] congregate within an area?

D: Ah, we got Shaughnessy Terrace.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes that's another problem up there.

**Tape I, side B ends**

**Tape II, side A begins.**

D: In the past, before I started working with CBA, CBA was organized because they wanted to tear down these housing and convert them into condos. And that's why the community got together. CBA got together and got organized. At that time they only had plans. No one was funding them. No one had the faith that the community had. And right now we have home ownership projects, which gives opportunity to the minority groups to have their own homes. Um also, we've been working with the landlords, like I said, to give the opportunity to people to live in a decent apartment. So these are on the Phase II Project. Now we're trying to see if we could get the bonds to be moved out from another place and build a unit, a home unit for. . .

S: What used to be city barn?

D: What use to be city barns, that they're still using, which just to keep the trucks in, and I think that's useless. I think they should move that out and use those buildings for some housing. We have people that come in everyday with Section 8 certificate, with nowhere to go. Their thirty, sixty days are up and they wind up losing an opportunity of having an apartment, because there is no housing available for them. And I think this is the way we have to work with it. You know, we have abandoned buildings. We should work on it and give these people an opportunity to live in these units.

S: Now you're being paid by CBA?

D: Yes.

S: And how are they funded?

D: Well it's through different organizations, and there's so many I can't mention them all. We've got Parker, Wang. We've got the [convent]...

S: Do you have Aetna [unclear]?

D: Aetna. We got so many it's. . .

S: Does the city contribute to that, or the state?

D: The State is helping out also. They helped us get the project. They were visiting. Amy was here recently and she was seeing the project.

S: She's a representative?

D: Yes she is. She came from Boston to see how our project is going on. And she was very happy to see that we [unclear] in our clients.

S: Now tell me about the Puerto Rican families? Are they large or are they small?

D: They're large. Most of them have six children, and it's lucky that you see maybe a family with one child. But most of them are three to four up.

S: [Unclear], is it culture?

D: It's culture. Yes it is.

S: On the man's part, [unclear] authority?

D: Yes it is. [Laughs] We're trying to fall into the modern ways, but our men are very traditional and they keep the culture alive. So they don't believe in small families. I'm a divorced parent. I think if I would have stayed married I would have more than one child. I have one child right now. But it's a tradition.

S: The husbands are not allowed to even practice birth control?

D: No, they don't believe in that. That's against their beliefs.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: They wouldn't, no. Ah, most of them. . .here I've seen lots of women that are doing it. In Puerto Rico I've heard they're really emphasizing that, because we are getting over crowded.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes.

S: Now when you're here in America, do they take types of birth control?

D: They are practicing.

S: Against their husband's wishes?

D: Against their. . .

S: Secretly?

D: Some of them are secretly. Some of them are against their will.

S: That means that women don't want large families?

D: Well because their goal is to progress economically. And if you have more children in the family, well you know you have more to get involved with them. The women are trying to. . .They come to this country sacrificing their traditions and sacrificing their lives going away from their country. And if they're going to have more children they won't have enough time to progress, you know?

S: When the women and the families are here, the women also go out to work here [unclear]?

D: Yes.

S: And do they still do the traditional women's work when they come home? Does the husband help?

D: Yes. Well most of the husbands are not willing to do, you know, to help in the house. Most of them, the mother has to come home from work and do what has to be done, because they won't do it. So the most they'll do is just wait and watch over the kids until she comes home.

S: But they will do that?

D: Yes, but they won't help out in the cooking. They won't help out organizing the house and things like that.

S: So that means the woman [unclear]

D: Right. Yes it is.

S: Now what else can you tell me about families? Are they very close? Families, close?

D: Yes.

S: [Unclear]?

D: Yes, we are very united. That's another thing I've noticed. I'm not very adjusted to American traditions. Our parents are very important. And once they come to the age of elderly, I've seen that most of the elderly Americans are put in the home. I feel that's cruel. We feel that's when our parents need us most. And we hang in there with our parents [unclear]. And I bump into lots of American people, white people, that will say that, tell us, well we like the way you treat your parents. You care for them a lot, because that's one of our most important thing is our parents. We cannot leave them just live their own life along and separate them from us. We can't.

S: So there are no Puerto Rican parents in nursing homes in Lowell?

D: I haven't heard of Hispanics in nursing homes. They do live in elderly apartments. But you see their family everyday going up and down the units, because they won't leave them alone.

S: But they wouldn't allow them to go into nursing homes?

D: They wouldn't allow that. No, that's the most...we find that to be cruel.

S: Umhm. Now what else can you tell me about families? What do they teach each other in the families? Do they have the traditions that they teach, or do they tell stories about [unclear]?

D: Yes we do. We sit down and talk about our ancestors, and how things used to be [unclear] and what happened with our grandparents. So we keep that alive.

S: And does everybody take a trip to Puerto Rico, at least one trip?

D: Yes.

S: [Cannot hear the question]

D: Yes. Well that's funny, now that we're talking about it. Cecilio hasn't been in Puerto Rico. He's heard lots of stories. He's Puerto Rican, and he's planning to go down there. It's funny, because the other day my father bought me a coconut and we used it. In our past we usually use it to eat from. That was our plate, and then the smaller coconut our parents used to drink coffee from. So, and Cecilio tells me he doesn't know the traditions because he was brought up here, but he's planning on making a trip to see the country. And he says, "Well what do you use that for," you know? And I couldn't believe that you don't know that this is what our ancestors used to use and our parents. Even I still do it at home. I use my cup of coconut and I drink coffee from it. And he says, "I didn't know that." [Laughs]

S: Now you said your father bought you a coconut here, or in Puerto Rico?

D: He bought it here.

S: You have, your father's here?

D: My father's alive, yes he's here.

S: Oh I see. In Lowell?

D: Yes.

S: Now does he have any other family in Lowell?

D: No, he came to visit, he's going back.

S: I see. And you have the tradition of drinking from those coconut cups?

D: Yes, yes.

S: It makes a good cup then?

D: Yes, yes. And the coffee, the flavor, aroma stays there and it's filling.

S: So it gives your coffee a coconut flavor?

D: No. I don't know, I guess it's the fibers that helps the coffee taste, I don't know, better. It doesn't taste like coconut, because they fix it in a way that only the shell stays there and I don't know, it tastes a lot better than drinking out of a porcelain cup or a glass. It tastes really good.

S: Can that be washed [unclear]?

D: Yes, you can wash it. It doesn't deteriorate. They paint it with varnish on the outside, so it looks like a glass sort of, but it's an authentic coconut.

S: Can you tell me about the magic? Puerto Ricans, some of them practice magic? In the Lowell Sun they wrote this series about it, some of this that they practice in Lowell. Do you know anything about it?

D: Yes. [Laughs] Well my father believes in that. This comes from the Africans. You know that they believe in voodoo and stuff. So then our race got mixed with Africans, so that's when the magic, all this got involved. And they believe that through this magic they could talk to the spirits. But I think it's sort of a traditional thing that comes from the African culture. It's not . . .

S: How [unclear]? Do you know?

D: Yes, because my parents used to take me there and see their sessions.

S: That's interesting, tell us about it.

D: Well it was really scary. You know, I used to fall asleep because I was scared to see those people. But I used to see lots of things. They would have this candle and this special water and lots of herbs.

S: Now why would your parents go to this thing?

D: To find out their future, to see if they would get rich sometime, or whatever. That's the way they got information, from the spirits. So sometimes they felt that they had bad luck and they need to wash away that bad luck. So they would go to the center and this person would tell you, well you know, they'd mention a whole bunch of names of herbs, you need to bathe in that to wash away your bad luck.

S: And was there a center for it in Puerto Rico?

D: Well these are people that traditionally do that in their homes. So people would pass the word out where they could go. And they were famous. Some of them, it's, I don't know, it's amazing the things I used to see. Spirits coming out from the walls you know? You'd see some smoke and stuff. I think it was a trick mainly.

**Interview ends**  
**jw**